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SUBJECT: OMAN MEDIA REACTION

11. SUMMARY: This week, the state-owned Arabic daily issued an uncharacteristic endorsement of the work of civil-society organizations, at least insofar as they "support existing institutions. As always, hopes for a Palestinian state loom large, especially in the private Arabic press. Finally, a private Arabic daily highlights, doubtless with official sanction, Oman's role as a neutral regional player in relation to the Sultan's intended Iran visit. END SUMMARY.

GROWING ROLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN OMAN

12. The government Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) on July 14, featured a piece from columnist Ahmad al-Falahi which applauding the efforts of civil society organizations in Oman to continue strengthening development in the country. "The Important Role of Civil Society Organizations":

"There are currently 52 Omani Women Associations (OWA), 21 other professional associations, 10 charitable organizations, and 8 (foreign) community clubs in Oman. These organizations continue to play an important role in supporting social and professional activities that strengthen the society. The institutions of civil society are reinforcing official institutions...to continue the process of development that Oman has undertaken."

SHOULD ARABS DECLARE A PALESTINIAN STATE?

13. On July 14, Arabic daily "Al Watan" (circulation 42,000) derided Israeli attempts at peace, calling them propaganda that tries to "brainwash the world's public opinion." The editorial also claims that Israel's refusal to comply with international law is grounds to declare a Palestinian state, asking "Will the Arabs and the Palestinians Do It?":

"Israel's continued refusal to stop settlements, to allow the return of refugees and to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine must all be used as reasons for the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state. The UN and the Quartet must commit to its moral responsibilities if it is honest in its direction toward peace ... Enough of the Israeli cheating, fraud, and false advertising launched by its leaders regarding their intention to start negotiations, mean to brainwash the world's public opinion."

GOOD NEIGHBORS AND HISTORICAL TIES

14. Private, youth-oriented Arabic daily "Al Shabiba" (circulation 20,000) published a commentary on July 14 by Zahir bin Harith al-Mahruqi about Sultan Qaboos's scheduled trip of to Iran, stressing that it will "strengthen historic and friendly relations" between the two neighbors. "Implications of this Historic Visit":

"The Iranian leadership has been looking forward to the visit of Sultan Qaboos to Iran. Since it is taking place at a difficult time, in which tensions prevail everywhere in the region, the visit aims at strengthening the historic and friendly relations between two neighboring countries, emphasizing the fundamentals of Oman's policy, which is based on the principles of good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of others. Therefore, the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yousif Bin Alawi stated that "the Sultanate did not participate in the meeting which was held in New York and called by the former U.S. Secretary of State, because her vision was to combine the Security Council and the Gulf Cooperation Council to draw plans against Iran, which Oman rejected; this is our clear policy."

HURTADO